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JOE'S PARTNER

By the Author of
"THE BABES IN THE
BASKET"





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A WELCOME TO THE STRANGER.

JOE'S PARTNER.

By the Author of

"THE BABES IN THE BASKET,"

&c. &c.

"My grace is sufficient for thee."

2 COR. xii. 9.

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JOE'S PARTNER.

CHAPTER I.

JOE'S HOME.

A WHOLE family working in the field together!—small, slight father; tall, gaunt mother; slender little boy, and merry little girl. There they all were, as busy as bees, and hoping, like so many others in the Great Republic, to make money if not honey by their labour.

The sun was hot, and the soil was tough, and it was plain it was a new business to them all; yet hour after hour they went steadily on.

First came the father making the holes for the corn; the boy dropped in the seed; then followed the mother, covering it all up nicely; and finally little Mollie danced and jumped by every hill, as if hers were the most important duty of all.

As the day wore away, the father stopped whistling at his work, and looked doubtfully at his small, blistering hands. The large eyes of the wife grew darker and more sunken, and her mouth was firmly shut, as if there were words within that needed more than prison bars to keep them from doing mischief.

Kate Barber was very tired, and tired women will take gloomy views of life.

"It is rather hard," she thought, "that I should have to work in the field in the hot sun until I am ready to drop, when we might have had a comfortable home if—"

Mollie peeped under her mother's sun-bonnet, and saw something there that made her cease to trip merrily at her side, and she drooped and lagged in the little procession like a wounded soldier. This could not last long with healthy, happy little Mollie. She found a dead bird, hushed it gently on her bosom, wrapped it in her apron, and sang to it until she was the perfect picture of content. The words of the childish singer came to her mother's ears,—

"Jesus loves me, this I know,
For the Bible tells me so."

Right to her heart they went like a message from heaven. Yes, Jesus loved her, tired Kate Barber. She believed she was his child. Had he not comforted her in many a sorrow? Was not the work in which she was now engaged an answer to her prayers? Had she not asked for some quiet home where her husband could be out of temptation? Had she not been willing to endure any hardship, if she might have a hope of keeping him from a drunkard's path?

God had put it into the heart of her old aunt to pledge herself that the first year's rent of this little place should be paid, that Harry Barber might have a chance to keep the good resolutions he professed to have made.

Kate Barber was ashamed of herself that she so soon had begun to murmur at her share in the labours of the new home. She was not the only one that



IN THE FIELD.

was tired, that was plain. Harry's red hair hung in dark points round his damp forehead; and her boy, her dear Joe, was actually limping, though he tried to put a good face on the matter, and laugh a little now and then with Mollie.

"Come," said the mother cheerily; "we have all worked enough for to-day, and I think we had better go in."

This proposition seemed to put new life into the little party, and they trudged toward the house as contentedly as if a luxurious meal were awaiting them. Fresh water, white bread, and a little cheese—how good they tasted! Hungry as they all were, it was no wonder that there was but little left when they arose from the table.

"Yes," thought Kate, "I must make bread to-night, and have it ready for breakfast in the morning; and that will be the last of the flour."

Kate knew that in their poor home the pantry and the purse were equally empty; but she was not in despair—her heavenly Father would care for her, and help her in all her troubles.

While Kate was silently clearing away the table, with these thoughts in her mind, Harry walked restlessly about. Now he was at the door, now at the window; at last he said decidedly,—

"I must go to town to-night. It can't be helped. I must mend the chicken-coop in the morning, and there's not a nail in the house."

"Never mind about the chickens; I'll see to them," said Kate cheerily. "You are too tired to take another step this day. Come, you stretch out on the settee."

"Stop, Kate," said the husband quickly; "I'm going to town. Didn't you say this morning the

flour was almost out, and your brown shawl must go for the next? I can take it in to-night, and get the flour and other things, and that will be taking Time by the forelock."

"Harry, I think there's a shower coming up; it's very black in the west. There's no use in going to-night," urged the wife.

"Get the shawl, woman," said Harry angrily. "Why must there be such a talk about everything?"

Kate silently obeyed.

She had not far to go, for there were but two rooms in the one-story house, and it was but a step to the trunk where her choicest treasures were kept. She had the key on a string, which she wore round her neck, "lest Mollie should rummage," she said, even to herself, though she knew there was some one else who might be tempted to go there secretly—some one who once had been as honest and true as the sun.

That brown shawl with the yellow spots had been a Christmas gift from her old aunt long years ago, and yet the folds in it were as fresh as if it had been bought yesterday. To Kate it was a most valuable possession, just the thing for a respectable married woman, and connected, too, with those bygone days before she knew care and bitter sorrow. To Harry it was an almost useless thing, that was kept locked up in a trunk, to come out once or twice a-year, on special occasions. It was much more to the purpose that it should provide for the family, he thought; and he threw it over his arm without so much as a "thank you" to Kate when she quietly handed it to him. Kate sat down on the door-step and watched her husband as he walked quickly away.

The house stood far back from the road, and on

the edge of the field where they had all been working that day. Along by the fence there was a foot-path, beside the two deep ruts that marked where occasional waggons had come up to the house. It was a poor, lonely-looking place; and a poor, lonely-looking woman Kate seemed, as she kept her eyes on her husband until he reached the turnpike and turned his face toward the town three miles away.

It was not her beloved shawl that Kate was regretting as she sat there silently. If it were but brought back in good food for them all, she would only be too thankful that so they were provided for; but there were saloons to be passed, there were old companions to be met with. Would Harry keep his new resolutions?

Kate was so anxious and miserable that she bowed her face on her knees, and sat for a moment the image of silent distress. Mollie came behind her, and, throwing her little brown arms round her neck, she said, —

“Come, mamma, I want to say my prayers and go to bed. Will you hear me?”

Prayer! that was just what the mother needed at that moment. She must place her hand in her Saviour's, or she could not go on in the dark, dreary road that seemed to stretch out before her. Mollie repeated the Lord's Prayer, and then added her usual petitions:—

“God bless father, God bless mother, God bless brother, God bless Mollie and make her a good girl.”

This was all; but in these few words the mother, too, drew near to the throne above and found comfort.

Mollie had not been long in bed when the wind began to sweep wildly round the house; the sky

grew darker and darker, until all was blackness without and within. Then came the wild flashing of the lightning, the roar of the thunder, and the strong torrents of driving rain.

Kate closed the windows and the door, lighted her small lamp, and drew her trembling little boy to her side. Her Joe he was, and she loved and even admired him. To others he was a small, sickly-looking lad, with a pale, earnest face, and a thin mouth, as tightly shut as if he had no teeth to keep it from falling in.

Joe was afraid of everything, dogs and tramps, wind and lightning, but most of all of his father. This was the great fear from which all others had sprung. It seemed as if the sight in his early childhood, of his father in his wild sprees, had cast a cloud over his young life, and made him tremble almost before his own shadow. Joe was a coward in one sense, and yet he had a little hero's heart in him. For his mother's sake he would have braved what he dreaded most—his angry, half-drunken father. Now in the midst of his fright he clung close to his mother, and tried to think of something to say to comfort her; for he well knew what anxiety was preying on her mind.

"Father'll be coming home soon," he whispered; "the lightning will show him the way. He'd turn back before he got to the toll-gate."

At this moment there was a loud knocking at the door, and the sound of some one calling without. Joe sprang from his mother's side, and straightened himself up, as if he were ready and able to protect her. He had hardly touched the latch of the door when some one came in with a bound.

It was not the slow step of his father when sober,

nor the lumbering, stumbling movement poor little Joe dreaded the most.

A figure, looking like the wild glad spirit of the storm, stood in the middle of the room, the water dripping from cap, hair, and clothes, as if they had been dipped in the river.

"What do you want here?" said Joe in his fiercest manner, as he looked round for a weapon.

To his eyes the stranger seemed to carry a rod big enough to chastise a whole schoolful of boys like himself, and to be dangerous even for his mother.

"I want to get out of the storm, giant," said a merry young voice; "may I stay in your castle till the rain is over?"

The stranger took off his cap, and said politely to Kate Barber, "You must excuse me for rushing in upon you as I did. I was so glad to get to a place of shelter, that I hardly thought what I was about. I have been making for your light for the last quarter of an hour, and thought I should never reach it, stumbling along in the field there. I've been fishing, and did not notice the storm until it broke upon me. Can I stop here a while, till it is over?"

"Certainly," said Kate Barber kindly. "It is a poor place, but you are welcome. I am sorry we have no fire for you to dry your clothes."

"Then you can't cook my fish for me. I've a lot of them here; they would make a splendid supper;" and with pride the tall, happy-faced boy showed the full basket of trout, the result of his day's sport.

Joe looked at the fish admiringly, and up at the bright eyes of the fisherman, until the half-fierce, half-fearful look was quite gone out of his little face.

"May I have some supper, giant?" said the stranger, with a playful look at Joe. "Can you

give me some bread and butter? I am hungry enough to swallow you whole, if you don't behave yourself."

Kate brought the piece of a loaf left from their evening meal, and said kindly, "We have no butter, but perhaps you could eat a bit of cheese."

"Cheese! that's splendid," said the boy. "I haven't had any cheese this age."

The broken loaf was soon consumed. "Now, some more, giant; may I have some more?" said the hungry visitor.

Joe looked at his mother.

"We have no more bread in the house. I mean to bake in the morning," said Kate politely.

"Well, bring me anything you have," said the boy; "I am not particular—cold meat, anything; I believe I could eat a cold potato, if I had some salt with it."

Kate blushed a little as she said, "We have nothing else in the house; I am very sorry."

The merry boy looked at the tall, gaunt woman, and the thin, timid-looking boy, then glanced round the bare room, and was silent.

Hungry he was truly—hungry enough to have enjoyed the plainest fare; but these poor people's hunger, it was plain, was no stranger to them, and he had eaten their last mouthful. No wonder the little boy had looked on wistfully as the bit of bread and cheese disappeared.

The guest felt for his purse. Of course it was not in his pocket; he had left it at home when he put on his fishing suit. He could not even pay for the shelter and food he had claimed almost as a right.

"Do you live here alone, my good woman?" said the stranger kindly.

"With my husband and the children," was the quiet reply; "we have only been here a week."

A long, long silence followed. Kate could have told how she was finding the hand-to-mouth way of living she had been accustomed to in town did not do very well in the country. A loaf of bread from the baker's, a little butter or cheese from the corner grocery, had helped her before through many a scant time like this. Her own small earnings, too, a half-day's washing here or cleaning there, had brought in a little ready money now and then, a reliance in time of need. She had not thought enough about the difficulties that would try her in this lonely home. There was no help for poverty here. She had but thought it would be well to go anywhere to keep her husband out of temptation. Out of temptation? Where was he now? When and how would he come back to his family?

The storm continued to rage without, and Kate said at last, "If you would take off your wet coat and lie down there on the settee, I could cover you over with a blanket, and perhaps you could sleep there till morning. Young folks can sleep almost anywhere when they are tired."

"Thank you; I believe I'm half asleep now," said the boy.—"Is your husband at home?" he ventured to add, glancing toward the inner room.

"There's only Mollie in there," was the answer. "My husband may not be home to-night; but I shall sit up and wait for him."

"What sort of a husband must this be?" thought the young stranger; and as he questioned and wondered, he laid aside his coat, and threw himself down on the wooden settee.

"Won't your mother be worried about you?" said little Joe, as he saw these preparations.

"I haven't any mother, giant," said the fisherman; "I wish I had."

"Then I'm richer than you are," said Joe; and he kissed his mother's brown hand, as if she had been a queen.

"Joe is a queer little fellow, not like other boys," said Kate as an apology.—"Come, Joe, you must go to bed too, it's very late."

"Come here before you go, giant," said the tired visitor; "I want to whisper to you. You be good to your mother, and take care of her, and I'll help you, and we'll see if we can't manage to always have some bread in this house. Is that a bargain, giant?"

Joe patted the arm of the stranger, and nodded his head knowingly, then whispered, "Really and truly?"

"Yes, really and truly. My name is Ben White, and Ben White always keeps his word. Ben White and the giant will go into business together, and we'll see what we can do. Now, good-night; I am awfully sleepy."

Joe bade him good-night, and walked to the bedroom door, as straight as an officer.

As for Ben White, he fell into as sound a sleep as if he had been in his own pretty room at home.

CHAPTER II.

LIFE PICTURES.

WE leave Ben White in the sound sleep of boyhood, to follow Harry Barber on his way to town.

As Harry moved down the slope that led from the house to the road, he wondered that after all he felt so little tired. He had a motive now that made movement easy. There was a burning thirst within him—a thirst which he was going to gratify; he had the means on his arm. He knew where that shawl would bring the money to feed the fire within him. He stepped quickly, but not quickly enough for the demon that was urging him on.

"There's a storm rising," he said to himself when half-way to town. "I had better take the short cut; the railroad will be the best way."

So down from the turnpike he hurried, and walked along the ties as swiftly as he could in the growing darkness. Suddenly he heard the loud whistling of an engine, and, looking behind him, he saw the one bright light of a locomotive glaring right in his face. He stepped quickly aside on to the other track, confused and frightened. Hardly had he had time to think that he was safe, when from the opposite direction, sweeping round a curve, another train bore down upon him. The fiery eye of the locomotive

was but a few yards from him on the track where he stood, while on that which he had quitted the rumbling cars were whirling past. He had not a moment to lose. Down he threw himself flat in a narrow hollow between the sleepers. The locomotive and a long, long train thundered along over him.

Not the engineer, not the passengers intent on gain or pleasure, knew of the poor, horror-stricken fellow-being who lay below them in the very jaws of death.

The train swept by and was gone in the darkness, yet there lay Harry Barber, like one in a trance. He hardly knew whether he was living or dead. His body stirred not, hand or foot, but his soul was awfully alive. More swiftly than the hurrying train had passed over him while he lay stretched close to the cold ground, through his mind had rushed the story of his life, that life for which he might that moment be called to account;—his happy, boyish face growing fuller and heavier as he learned to consider something good to eat as his greatest pleasure; the apples stolen from a neighbour at night, and eaten in secret; the pies from the pantry, the cider from the cellar, taken so slyly and swallowed so greedily; the first drink at a bar, with a bold outside manner, and a guilty, frightened feeling within; his first fit of intoxication, concealed by the other boys, and passed off as a bad headache at home in the morning; his place as clerk in a liquor shop, where, selling liquor to others, he secretly found chances to feed the strong taste that was growing within him. Then came the picture of his Kate, as he first knew her—the boast of the village, straight and slender as a young elm; how proud he was the day she shyly promised to be his bride—a promise, too, he then

made to her that never thereafter would he taste a drop of the drink that he loved. He could remember how he broke that promise, secretly and carefully at first. He could see the old tree where his bottle was hidden and visited in the darkness; how he grew bolder, and declared it a childish folly to give up what did him good—a silly promise, better broken than kept; how Kate pleaded at first, but in vain, then grew silent and hollow-eyed; how she bore all patiently until he struck their little boy, their poor little Joe. Then her smothered wrath broke forth, and she declared *that* she would never bear. He might neglect her, starve her, beat her; but her children should be safe, if they were sheltered in the almshouse. How little Joe learned to hide away when his father was coming, and Kate to meet him with a troubled, anxious face! Only little Mollie never turned from him; he believed she loved him yet. And Kate, too, she loved him—yes, loved the poor, worthless, drunken fellow, who lost every place his good manners or her good name got for him; was turned out here, and turned out there, till even in a liquor-shop no one would have him for a clerk. She loved him, though he had made her a poor, hard-working, hungry, desperate woman. She loved him; he had heard her pray for him when she thought him asleep. She loved him; and what had he been to her? Cold, hard, harsh, and even cruel.

All this Harry Barber remembered, and more. He knew there was a God in heaven, a righteous Judge. He knew he had taken his sound, healthy body, and made it a poor, trembling, diseased thing, that preferred the destroying drink to its simple, natural food. He knew that he had forgotten his Creator, refused the Saviour, and resisted the Spirit

—that he had given himself over to the ways of sin. His prayers neglected, his Bible unopened, the church unvisited—these were the beginnings. Then came the oath unchecked, the lips polluted, the heart a home of vile, wicked thoughts, the hands idle, the whole man sold, yes, sold to the devil, and fit for everlasting punishment.

Such, such were the thoughts that tormented the soul of Harry Barber as he lay, like a crushed worm, beneath the whirling cars.

That wild rumbling was over, and all was silence in a moment; then came the awful rolling of the thunder and the sharp flashes of lightning. To Harry they seemed like the voice and eye of God, that God whom he had offended, and who seemed so near him now. He tried to stir. He seemed benumbed in every limb. The fear seized him that another train would come hurrying over him. He could not bear another such moment of agonized waiting, with those wild cars dashing over him. With a strong effort he broke the spell upon him, and rolled over and over, until he felt at last that he was safe from that danger. But he could not rise. There, lying on the wet ground, with the rain beating upon him, his mind clear and his soul aghast, he saw himself—an unforgiven sinner, having no hope, and without God in the world. His friends were of the street corner and the dram-shop—friends who helped to drag him down to ruin, but never lent a kindly hand to give him a meal when he was hungry, or to keep him back from going to swift ruin, body and soul. Such are the drunkard's friends!

CHAPTER III.

K A T E.

IT was past midnight when Ben White was roused from his sound sleep by a loud knocking at the outer door. The patient wife had dropped her weary head upon her hands as they rested on the table before her. Now she started up, with a wild, anxious expression, and unbolted the door.

It was with a weak, unsteady step that Harry Barber put his foot on the threshold, but there was a solemn earnestness in his face and a clearness in his utterance that assured Kate that this time, at least, he had escaped his peculiar temptation.

"Dear wife, thank God! I am safe at home again."

"Dear wife!" It was long since Kate had got such a greeting from her husband, and her heart throbbed with pleasure.

"But you are very wet, Harry, and covered with mud, too," she said; "and how pale you look!"

"Kate," he answered solemnly, "I have been almost a dead man, and I can hardly believe now that I am safe and sound, standing here by you once more."

Harry told, in a rapid, earnest way, all that had befallen him, tracing back the pictures of his life as they had passed before him, stopping now and then as he was choked with emotion.



HARRY BARBER'S RETURN HOME.

It was in vain that Ben White stirred and half rose on the settee. No notice was taken of him, and he finally sank back and tried to compose himself again to sleep.

"Kate," said Harry after a pause, "I cannot tell you how I have suffered all these wicked years. I seem to be no longer my own master. The devil has me bound soul and body. Many a time I have thought to get free, and could not. I must go on till death strike me, and then—that awful hereafter!"

Here Harry covered his face with his hands and shuddered.

"I see what I am before God. How he must hate and despise me! Think what I have brought you to, and the children. Why, Joe is afraid of his own father. I can see it in his way every time he looks at me."

"But we love you," said Kate tenderly. "We don't feel hard toward you. God is a great deal more merciful than we are; and if you want to be forgiven, you need only ask him. For the sake of the Lord Jesus, he will hear you."

"But I can't ask him. I am not fit, and he knows it. Then it is of no use for me to try to be better. I must just go on till I am like a horrid brute, to lie down and die in the gutter. I tell you, Kate," and there was a fierce look in Harry's eyes, "I tell you, there's a devil, not outside of me, but inside of me, and it will have drink—it must have drink. Oh that I had never tasted it! Oh that a drop of it had never touched my lips! Now, there's no help. Have you any in the house, Kate? Just one glass would cure me of this tremble."

"Harry," said Kate earnestly, "stop; hear me

for a moment. When the Lord Jesus was on earth, they brought to him men possessed with devils. Their friends brought them when the poor creatures could do nothing for themselves; and the Lord spoke to those cruel devils, and they came out of the men, and left them to worship God and lead a new life. Come, we will kneel down together here where we are, and I will ask God to help you, and you join in if you can. You have never tried that. God made you. He knows just how your soul and body are put together, and how your soul wants to do right and your body won't let it. He can help you. You know the Lord Jesus once had a body too, though he never let it do wrong. You know *he* suffered, being tempted. Come, we will ask him to take away this dreadful thirst, or else to help you to resist it."

Harry let Kate draw him down to his knees. His heart followed her, though his lips were silent, while she asked the tender, compassionate Jesus to pity her poor husband, and set him free from the awful habit that seemed like a devil within him. But not alone for that she prayed. She brought the humbled penitent beside her in faith to her heavenly Father. She confessed for him the sins of a lifetime, and then claimed the promise that though his sins were as scarlet they should be as white as snow through the blood of Jesus. What he dared not ask for himself she asked for him—asked of the Lord, who had long been her beloved friend and comforter, her stay and trust.

Harry followed the eager, earnest words of his wife with a yearning but almost hopeless heart; but as she pleaded for him, speaking to God as if he loved the poor drunkard beside her and longed to

save him, a glimmer of light broke in upon his soul. Yes, the thief on the cross was saved; why might there not be hope for him? The Christ who raised the dead could raise him up to newness of life.

"No! not despairingly
Come I to thee;
No! not distrustingly
Bend I the knee.
Sin hath gone over me,
Yet is this still my plea,
Jesus hath died "

CHAPTER IV.

A RESOLUTION.

THERE was no more sleep for Ben White that night. He had entered that poor home in a merry mood, excited and exhilarated by battling with the storm. Full of health and prosperity, he had thought it a fine joke to rough it a little, and have a good story to tell about it in the future. Ben called himself a Christian boy. He had never thought it possible he could be anything but a member of the church and a right-principled man. Now the awful reality of the truth of God came home to him with power. How would his life look when pictured before him at the last day? The hand of his Lord he had before taken as a right and natural thing; now, with new love, he grasped again that outstretched hand, and felt that only so could he be safe from destruction, and pass through this world of temptation to the rest above.

In Kate's prayer for her husband Ben had heartily joined. How he realized the power of that habit against which Harry Barber had so long struggled in vain!

Then and there Ben White made a resolution: not a drop of anything intoxicating should ever again pass his lips. Wine he had occasionally taken at his father's table with older Christian friends.

Henceforward he would not touch it, lest some one possessed of the demon should say: "It was with you I first learned to drink, and now I cannot get free." How did he know that he was himself secure from temptation? There was but one absolutely safe path. He would have nothing to do with that which at the last could burn like a fire and sting like an adder.

Ben grew impatient for the morning light. There was work for him to do. He longed to be up and at it. This vacation, which Ben had meant to idle away, must be a busy time for him. Who could tell whether he should live till school began again? and what had he done for the kingdom of his Redeemer? What had he done for his fellow-creatures, if he should suddenly be called to his account? What could he say of his stewardship? Fourteen years of health of body and mind in a Christian land, a luxurious home, and a full purse. What had he rendered to God for all his blessings?

Ben had had no mother to prompt him to a spiritual, Christian life, or to deeds of mercy and love. His father had been satisfied to know that Ben was what he called a "correct boy," a good scholar, and a merry, happy fellow, whom everybody loved.

That father was now away from home on a long journey, and Ben was quite the master of the house, as he was an only child; so he had not hesitated to spend the night as he could, to escape further buffeting of the storm.

As soon as it was light, Ben opened the outer door, and, fishing-rod in hand, he went out silently.

How delicious he found the fresh morning air! The three-mile walk was a mere pastime.

What a breakfast he made, and how he did wish "the giant" were beside him to enjoy the good cheer with him !

Ben had not finished his comfortable meal when the old housekeeper stepped into the room.

He was ashamed to find that she had sat up all night for him. He had not once thought that any one would take any trouble about him. He felt himself so completely the master in his father's absence, he did not realize that to the old servants he was but a child, and a child left in their charge.

"Your father is at the door," said the housekeeper soberly ; "shall I tell him about your not coming home last night?"

"I'll tell him myself. I am sorry, though, I gave you so much bother," said Ben, as he bounded to the door to welcome his father home.

Mr. White was a quiet, reserved man, and Ben had never been very confidential with him. Now, however, the boy's heart was so full that as soon as they were seated at table he poured out the story of his last night's adventures.

Mr. White ate silently, but evidently listening with interest. As Ben described the tall, thin woman, the courageous "giant," and the empty larder, he looked into his father's cold, light-blue eyes. Could it be that they were full of tears?

Mr. White said nothing, took another muffin quietly, the eyes grew clearer, and Ben thought he must have been mistaken.

Ben found no difficulty in telling his story, until he came to the point where his own feelings had been so deeply roused ; this he passed over shortly, simply saying :—

"I never realized before what a miserable, useless

life I have led. I trust I shall be forgiven, and helped to do better. But, father," he continued, "one thing I have resolved—that I will never drink a glass of wine again. It is not that I think my influence will be worth much, but I want that very little to be on the right side. And then, father, I might go wrong myself—who knows? Some of the boys no older than I am take too much for them. So you won't mind, father, if my glass stands empty?"

"No, child," said Mr. White soberly—"no, child; but you shall never be tempted to break your resolution at my table, nor shall my example be in your way. At home, and everywhere, my glass shall stand empty too, from this day henceforward."

To Ben's surprise, his father rose hastily, kissed his forehead, and with a "God bless you, my boy," quitted the room.

In the boy's young face, touched with deep feeling, Mr. White had seen again the earnest, appealing expression of the wife who had once softened his calm, cold nature, and prompted him to many a loving deed. She had been received "up higher," while her husband was left, in his speechless grief, shut out by his reserve, as by a strong wall, from human sympathy, and had little by little grown almost forgetful of that divine love which can alone cheer and sustain. His Christian life had grown dull and formal: it was paralyzed, not dead.

Ben sat alone, in silent gratitude. He had but thought to make to his heavenly Father the poor offering of the influence of a penitent boy, and now he had the promise of his earthly father's sanction and help for the cause that was already dear to his heart.



BEN WHITE'S RESOLUTION.

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CHAPTER V.

MR. BROWN.

HARRY BARBER'S little family were gathered at the breakfast-table on the morning after his escape. It was a scanty meal—just a warm loaf and a pitcher of fresh water; but as the husband and wife looked at each other there was a silence: the same deep feeling of gratitude was filling their hearts.

Harry folded his hands and looked upward, saying,—

“We thank God for his mercies; we thank him for daily bread; may he help our souls. Amen.”

The words were few and simple, but this was the first family prayer in that household; and as Kate broke the bread and gave it to the children, she felt as sure that the Saviour was lovingly present as when on the mountain-side he blessed the loaves and gave them with his own hands to the disciples.

All the Barbers were again cheerily at work in the field together, when they heard the sound of the letting down of the bars by the turnpike. Yes; there was a man in a light waggon, certainly coming to see them, for the road along the edge of the field led only to their poor little home.

Joe thought of Ben White and his promise about the partnership, but he saw with disappointment that

this was a stout, red-faced man, who had anything but Ben's merry, frank expression.

The stranger quietly tied his horse to the fence, and then came toward the little party, who stood waiting to see what he could want.

"Mr. Barber, I believe?" he said, looking respectfully at Harry. "I'm a stranger to you; my name is Brown."

Mr. Brown went on to give the little group a very flattering sketch of himself. It was a wonder that the virtuous and prosperous life he described had not given him a more pleasing appearance. He had been in the grocery line, always doing a good business wherever he was. He had a good name in the country; that was a comfort. He had never been a drinking man. He thought it a shame for any man to take more than was good for him. The way to avoid that was to have a respectable place, where a working-man could take a dram and be never the worse for it. In short, he was going to have just such a place, where an honest, respectable man could step in and take a drink and never find bad company. He did not mean to have any noisy, low doings about his place. Why, if a man came to the shop drunk, he must be put out of the door and sent about his business. That was the only way to manage the matter.

He had his license; his shop was open and promised to do well—so well that he needed a clerk. He had heard of Mr. Barber—that he was a man to be trusted, one that was a favourite, with a pleasant way with him, and a civil word for everybody. He had heard, too, he did not mean to take anything more himself. That was a good thing. A drinking man in a liquor-shop would never do. That was

poor management. He couldn't offer Mr. Barber much. Six dollars a-week was, to be sure, no great sum, but still it would help to make ends meet. Here he looked at the hard, tough soil, and then at the thin woman and eager-faced little boy.

"You wouldn't be needed before eight o'clock in the morning," he continued; "and then as to going home at night, that would be as the custom should be. If you got belated any time, why here's the waggon; and Billy, he'd bring you out in less than no time, and you could drive him in in the morning. You see, I like to accommodate;" and Mr. Brown drew up his little fat figure, and tried to look amiable.

"It might do," said Harry, looking at Kate. "We can't go on in this way. Why, it will be winter before we get anything to speak of off the place."

This he said in an undertone, as he drew his wife away from the group.

"Don't do it, Harry," said Kate earnestly. "Remember the prayer about keeping out of temptation."

"It seems to come to me a safe kind of a place just when I want to do well," he urged. "When I see you look so thin and pale, and think how I have brought you to it, I can't bear it. You must have nourishing food, and so must the children. I don't see any other way. One mustn't be too particular. I could look out, too, for the other fellows in such a place and see that they did not get too much. I think I must try it."

Here Harry stepped back toward Mr. Brown. That worthy man hastened to say,—

"I mentioned six dollars a-week, but there are little things that come in that I could throw in your way to get for a trifle. We often have a hat or a

good coat or something of that kind that you could get for half its value—yes, almost for nothing, if you do well by me. Why, I have a coat now that would be just the thing for you for Sunday.”

Now Kate loathed the thought of those garments, pawned, no doubt, for drink by some poor wretches who almost give their souls for one more cup of the poison that is destroying them.

“Harry,” she said, “I must speak out plainly.” She saw he was yielding, and did not mean to give her another private hearing. “Harry, I would rather see you in rags than in clothes some poor drunken creature has sold for drink. ‘Touch not, taste not, handle not,’ is the only plan for you. Keep away from the very smell of drink. Don’t risk your soul by standing selling poison to men who are crazy for it, to send them, beside themselves, to make some poor wife miserable. I hate the very name of a liquor-shop. I wish they were all shut, so that poor, weak men and women might have a chance to keep their good resolutions.—Yes, Mr. Brown, my husband has a pleasant way with him, but he won’t use it to lead other men into the pit he means to keep out of himself. He means to be a sober, Christian man, and to lead such a life that, at the last great day, he will have no lost souls saying, ‘You dragged me down; you sold me the drink that ruined me!’”

Kate paused from the very excess of feeling.

“Very well talked, ma’am,” said Mr. Brown coolly. “That does for you women, but a man who feels the responsibility of providing for a family feels differently. In these times he can’t choose his business. When an opening comes he must take it. I understand just how it is with you, ma’am. I take

no offence, but you needn't be so wrought up. Your husband here can be just as temperate a man in my shop as out here, where there's nothing to drink, and maybe not so very much to eat either."

It was plain that Harry was being influenced; what could the poor wife do?

"Yes," continued Brown, seeing he was gaining ground,—“yes, and there'd often be work for the boy too, taking home a trifle for a customer, an errand here or there.—Would you like to turn an honest penny, my boy?”

Kate put her arm around Joe, as if Mr. Brown were going to carry him off bodily. She need not have feared for the giant; he had already a mind of his own.

Joe drew himself up in his fiercest way and said, “That's not the work for me, Mr. Brown; I hate the very sight of liquor.—Please, father,” he urged boldly, “I just want to say one thing to you: Don't do anything till you see the young gentleman, the one who was here last night; I know he has got something in his head for us. Just wait a day or two, and you'll find out about it.”

“Nonsense!” said the father hastily,—“nonsense! your young gentleman, who went off this morning without so much as saying thank-you for his supper and lodging, won't be likely to give us six dollars a-week out of friendship!”

“Waiting won't do,” said Mr. Brown; “I must have my answer this morning; I have another man in my eye—a single man with no wife to keep him in leading-strings.”

“Harry,” said Kate solemnly, “remember the last great day! How would you like then to see a picture of all the men you had tempted to drink

coming up to look you in the face, and reproach you for what you'd brought them to? I'd rather starve. I'd rather work my hands to the bone than see you going right into temptation, and being a decoy to wile other men down to ruin. Bid Mr. Brown good-morning, and tell him we have a heavenly Father, who will never suffer us to lack our daily bread while we are trying to serve him."

"Good-morning, Mr. Brown; I will not take the place," said Harry firmly. "Get out of the business yourself, sir, as soon as you can; you will not like the look of it when this world is over.—Thank God, Kate, you have saved me. Yes, we'll try and stand by the right, wife, and God will help us!—Good-bye, Mr. Brown; we've done with drink in this house; a crust and honest work is better for us, with God's blessing on our little home!"

Mr. Brown saw that Harry was in earnest now, and had really made a decision.

The liquor-seller did not look very amiable as he untied his horse, and drove rapidly over the rough road without once looking behind him.

"Dear papa," said Mollie, clinging to her father, "I love you ever so much."

"Yes, we all love you," said Kate. "God be praised, you are a forgiven man; and our heavenly Father will bless our poor home, and never suffer us to want."

CHAPTER VI.

THE UNCLEAN SPIRIT.

THERE was no miraculous blessing on Kate Barber's little store of meal; Saturday evening had come, and that little store was gone.

There must be another trip to town. Something else must be sacrificed, that was plain. The shawl had been lost in the fright and darkness; but Kate had hardly given it a thought in her joy at her husband's escape, and its deep, purifying effect upon his mind. She took out her few trinkets; they had better go than clothing that was really needed.

"You will have to go to town, Kate," said Harry humbly; "I dare not trust myself in temptation. You will have a heavy load to bring back; but maybe not so very heavy, after all—you may not get an honest bargain."

Joe followed his mother into the inner room. "I'll go with you and help you to bring home the things," said the boy, as if his weak little arms had the strength of a man.

Kate did not like to say to her child that he must stay and watch his father, but she gave him a significant look which he well understood, as she answered, "No, Joe, you must look out for things at home; and then you can come down to the road and help me when I come back."

"Yes, yes," said the little boy soberly. As his mother walked down the half-overgrown path, he called after her, "Never fear, mother; you'll find it all right when you come home."

Kate had not been gone long when Harry, having put aside the few tools that had been used during the day, began to be restless—a restlessness that Joe well knew betokened no good. "Father," he said cheerfully, "I am going into business. I don't know exactly what kind of business yet; you can't guess who is to be my partner."

Harry made a feint of guessing all the street-boys of the town neighbourhood where they had lived, and finally blurted out hastily: "Don't be foolish, Joe; I don't feel like nonsense to-night."

"I don't either, father," said Joe, nothing daunted; "I'm for work. I wish you'd show me about those sums mother set me last night; I have added them up, but I don't know how to prove them."

Joe had great faith in Ben White's promise, though two days had passed and nothing had been seen of the fisherman. Joe felt he was on the eve of going into partnership with a very charming young gentleman, and fancied that somehow his improvement in arithmetic would help to make their business profitable; now, he had an added motive for his eagerness to make sure that his much-laboured-over "sums" were right.

A pleased look stole over the little fellow's face as he saw his father running up column after column with the greatest rapidity, and really interested in what he was about. "How fast you can add, father," he said; "you must be a jolly book-keeper. I don't wonder Mr. Brown wanted you; I should think anybody would like such a hand at figures."

Maybe we'll be keeping our own shop some day, won't we, father, eh? We won't sell any liquor, no, not a drop! If a man comes in and wants anything to drink, we'll just say, 'We don't keep any such thing!' won't we?"

"Yes, indeed," said Mollie, who was sitting on the floor, just where she liked best to be, nestled close to "brother Joe."

Joe laughed.

"We shan't let girls sell in our shop; no, indeed. You'll be sitting in the back room, with your sewing machine going like mad, making the most beautiful things for ladies—just such as we used to see in the window at the big shop where the wax little girl turns round and round and never gets her hair out of order. She isn't a bit like you—eh, Mollie?"

Here Joe put his hand into Mollie's little mop of brown curls, which, to say the truth, did not look at all like the smooth locks of the figure which had long been the children's special admiration.

While they were talking on so merrily, Harry got up again, and began to move about with an uneasy, anxious expression, that sobered Joe in a moment.

"Father," said the boy, taking his hand persuasively,—“father, there are some awful long words in my Sunday-school lesson for to-morrow; won't you read it over with me? I shan't have a moment to look at it in the morning. It is a good bit of a walk from here to the church even for me, father.”

Harry could not help smiling at the boy's manner—half-playful, half-consequential.

Joe took courage at this hopeful sign and went on. He had his Testament in his hand in a moment, and drawing his father to the door-step, he said,—

"Come; we can sit here.—And you, Mollie, you

be quiet, and make believe you think father is the minister."

"A poor minister I should be," thought Harry Barber, but he took the book in silence

"It's the fifth chapter of St. Mark," said Joe. "I've got to read it all through, right out in the class. It's my turn to-morrow; and my teacher said she expected me to go right through it like a man. I've one verse to say out of the book—only one. When you come to it I'll stand up and say it. You see if I haven't got it perfectly."

Harry Barber had been proud of his reading as a young man, and now he felt a little pleasure in showing his child that here, at least, his poor father could give him help.

Harry began in a loud voice, and a conscious, pompous manner, with pronouncing the word "Gadarenes" without stumbling, and as if he were very familiar with the region referred to.

In fact, Harry had very little idea where the occurrences related in the Bible took place. Indeed, he almost fancied it was in some other world than our own, and by no means in places to which men could now travel and even stand on the very spots our Saviour once visited in the flesh.

As Harry read the description of the man with the unclean spirit, his manner changed into one of deep, unconscious interest. In the poor victim tormented by the unclean spirit he seemed to see a picture of himself. His resolutions and his reformations had hitherto been as the fetters and chains the demon had broken at will; and truly it could have been said of him, "Neither could any man tame him." Yet Jesus had power to cast out that unclean spirit; and those who had known the poor man, an

outcast, roaming among the tombs, cutting himself with stones, saw him "sitting clothed, and in his right mind." Would he not have compassion on poor Harry Barber too?

"If I only could believe he would help me," thought Harry; and absorbed in his own thoughts he read on, not thinking of what he was doing.

Suddenly little Joe called out, "Stop, father! here comes my verse; it's the next, I know."

Joe sprang to his feet and slowly and reverently recited: "As soon as Jesus heard the word that was spoken, he saith unto the ruler of the synagogue, Be not afraid, only believe."

Joe's little, earnest, solemn tones were to his father as a voice from heaven.

"Be not afraid, only believe." That was the message for him, and in his heart he treasured it up as his watchword.

"Thank you, Joe," said his father very gently, so gently that the boy looked full into his face in surprise.

"Didn't I say it right?" he questioned, with a puzzled look.

"Thank you; yes, child," said the father again, as he resumed his reading, and then quietly went through the chapter.

Harry closed the book reverently, and put it himself in its place carefully, as if it were the casket that contained some precious thing.

Precious indeed to him that night had been the words of Holy Writ. The unclean spirit that threatened again to triumph within him had been driven out. It might find a home with other poor lost men, but Harry Barber that night was not to be as the brutes who rushed down the steep place and were choked in the sea.

Kate Barber had but poor success in the sale of her paltry trinkets. The wretch who bought such things, not asking whether they were stolen or sold in the extremity of want, saw that she was in bitter need, and would give her but a trifle for what he called "such trash."

So it happened that the wife had but a light load comparatively to bring home. She cheered herself, however, with the thought: "It is but 'daily bread' that God promises us, and he can help us when this little supply is gone."

Her step was weary as she trudged along the turnpike, and her heart full of anxiety. Had all gone on well during her absence? Would her husband be at home to meet her?

Coming rapidly toward her in the twilight, while yet a mile from home, she saw Harry stepping firmly along, Joe's hand fast in his, and Mollie skipping at their side as fresh and gay as if it were morning.

"Now we'll pretend we are robbers, eh, father?" said Joe; "and we'll take everything away from that woman walking alone on the road.—You, Mollie, too; you must be a robber. You take the kettle, and don't let her have it again if she cries like a baby.—Now, I'm the captain; come on, my boys," said Joe with awful fierceness. "Here's luck for us.—Woman, we let no people loaded this way pass us on the road.—Somebody take the sack. That's right.—Now, Mollie. Here, give me the basket.—Don't be frightened, woman; we won't hurt you.—We are good robbers, ain't we, Mollie? We never kill anybody!"

Tired as she was, Kate could not help laughing at the merry party. And Harry, with the sack on his back, and the old worn look gone out of his

face, he looked almost as fresh as his children, as his eyes sparkled to see his Kate smiling—smiling as she used to do long ago. He was beginning to love her again, as he did in the first days of their marriage.

“Father of all ! we bow to thee,
Who dwell’st in heav’n adored ;
But present still through all thy works,
The universal Lord.

“Still let thy grace our life direct ;
From evil guard our way ;
And in temptation’s fatal path
Permit us not to stray.”

CHAPTER VII.

THE PARTNER.

JOE was losing faith in his partner. A whole week had passed and nothing had been heard from Ben White, when one morning a servant on horseback appeared at the little house on the hill.

Kate stepped to the door anxiously. Could it be that Mr. Brown had written to her husband? No. The note that was handed her was addressed to Joe—"Little Joe, the Giant;" that could only mean her darling, and the writer must be the lad whom he remembered with so much interest.

Wild with proud excitement Joe broke open the note; his pride abated, however, when he found he could with difficulty make out its contents. Ben's hand-writing was but a scrawl, and Joe had never had a letter before in his life, and, to his surprise, he found that it was by no means so easy to read as the well-formed copies in the writing-books.

"You read it, father," said Joe, "and I'll listen. I do wonder what it can be about? the partnership, I suppose," and Joe looked dignified.

Harry Barber read aloud in his best style:—

"DEAR LITTLE GIANT,—Your partner has been awfully sick—sick in bed—or he would have at-

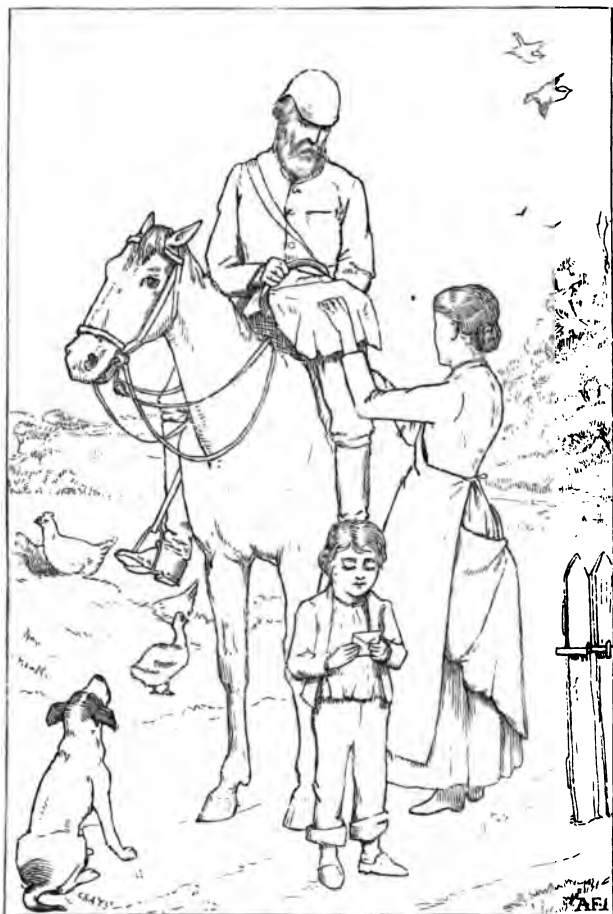
tended to business. Now I can't come to you to settle matters, so I think you'll have to come to me. Ask your mother if she can't spare you for a week. Father wants you to come. It would be jolly to have you to help me a little, for I am off my legs. Perhaps wading in the brook all day and sleeping in my wet clothes didn't suit me. At any rate, old 'Pills'—that is what I call the doctor—has been dosing me day after day, and I am as weak as a cat. Why, he wouldn't let me write to you until now; and, of course, between partners, I couldn't trust our business to a servant. I believe you'll come. If you do, you can ride behind Tom, our man. I've often tried it and found it splendid. Bring your Bible, Joe. Partners ought to read the Bible together.—Yours, etc.,

BEN WHITE."

Round the last sentence Ben had drawn a line, making a kind of sacred enclosure, to shut off that part of the letter from the more secular remainder. Ben's life was as yet much like his letter—the serious portion set off by itself, not pervading, sanctifying, and elevating all he thought and said and did. He met his heavenly Father reverently and lovingly from time to time, but he did not live in the consciousness of his continual presence. Ben had much yet to learn as a Christian boy.

As for Joe, he was in a state of perfect delight. He took up his Testament, and with a "Mother, I know you will let me go," he ran to the door to mount behind Tom, like a minute-man in war-time.

Kate did not know whether to laugh or to cry, as she looked at Ben's visitor in his home costume. His patched little blue shirt had seen two days' labour in the field; and his trowsers, his only other



A MESSAGE FROM JOE'S PARTNER.

garment—a pair of his father's cut down in a hurry, and now rolled up to his knees—were in no fashion familiar to town eyes.

“Stop, stop, Joe,” said his mother. “You may go, but not now—not as you are. You will need your other suit; and I must put up a little bundle for you, for a change, and—dear me! your shoes are all out at the toes.”

“Never mind my shoes, mother, now. Ben and I are partners; and then, don't you remember how his boots looked the night he was here? They did look hard, though. He won't care how I am dressed.”

“But I do,” said Kate.

“Poor boy!” exclaimed Harry, as he looked at his eager child. How the father's heart smote him that his wretched habits had brought his children to poverty!

“You don't mind Joe's going, Harry?” said Kate. “He was a nice young gentleman, and I am sure he means well by Joe.”

“Joe,” said Harry solemnly, without answering his wife—“my boy, maybe you'll see good things to eat there that you are not used to. Don't touch a thing that's not given to you; and, remember, your stomach's a poor master. Don't let it get the upper hand with you. Know when you are done, and stop. They may have wine there—who knows? You wouldn't touch a drop of drink, my boy?”

“Not if I were paid in gold, father. You may be sure of that,” said Joe warmly.

“But we are keeping the man waiting,” said Kate. “I'll tell him you'll be there this afternoon. But where?”

Kate gave the message politely, and got the direction carefully, so that little Joe might have no trouble in finding the house.

"Please, ma'am," said the servant, "Master Ben sent this too;" and he handed down a basket so heavy that Kate almost dropped it with surprise as she took it in her hand. On the cover a scrap of paper was pinned, which read as follows:—

"FOR MY PARTNER.—Here's all I ought to have eaten for a week. I don't know what to do with my share of the family provisions, so I send it to my partner, to make up for that night I was so hungry at his house.
B. W."

"B. W." must have been blessed with an uncommonly good appetite, judging from his week's allowance.

Kate looked at Harry. Would he like her to accept the gift?

"It don't do for my pride to stand in the way of you and the children's having what's comfortable, after what I've brought you to," said Harry.

Perhaps his pride was a little mollified by the sight of such good cheer, which he much needed just then, and to which he had long been a stranger. As for Mollie, she testified her unqualified approval of the whole proceedings; especially she declared herself satisfied with the contents of the basket.

"I'm sorry you can't go too, Mollie," said Joe: "but, of course, a girl would be of no use. Then, you know, I'm the partner, and it's natural I should be the one. Never mind, Mollie, I shall have heaps to tell when I come back. We boys have to see the world, and then the girls hear about it from us."

Mollie was too deep in a seed-cake to make any reply to Joe's apology, and evidently was not in deep grief at the separation.

Joe felt quite like a man when afternoon came, and he started for town. His little bundle was in one hand, tied up in a pocket-handkerchief; and in the other he carried an extempore cane, big enough for an infirm grandfather. This cane was to be Joe's weapon, offensive and defensive, by the way. There was the mill to be passed, and the miller's great dog was sure to stand at the door, opening his mouth wide, as if he were fairly longing for a bite of the leg of just such a boy as Joe Barber. He had done it before, and he would be sure to do it again.

As for the tramps, the very thought of them made Joe grasp his cane tighter, and whirl it round his head, to see how it would operate in a skirmish; and then he tried a quick little run, to make sure that his legs were in training for service, in case sudden flight should be necessary.

Joe had no occasion to put his pluck to the test by the way. He fairly arrived at Mr. White's door without any adventure worthy of being related even to Mollie, always a patient listener.

It was well that Joe's courage had not been drained, for he needed all his little stock even to ring at the door and ask for his partner. Very far from that partner he felt as he went up the high white marble steps, and stood in the tiled vestibule. Ben White and little Joe! why, there seemed almost a world between them.

Joe had given the bell a fierce ring, as his spirit conquered his timidity, and the door was promptly opened. He did not need to say a word, for the man who appeared was the same who had brought the note; and he said, with a quizzical look, which Joe did not think quite complimentary, "Master Ben's

at home, of course, and in a great hurry to see you. He's quite in a fever; you must go up at once."

Joe wiped his shoes, as his mother had directed. It was a dangerous process, and they might have come to pieces in the midst of the experiment; and with this little preparation he entered the house. He felt as if he were in a mysterious and charming dream, as he climbed the long staircase and then followed the servant to a room where the door stood open.

"Hallo, partner! that's jolly!" said a voice from a great sofa, where a figure in a dressing-gown lay among heaps of pillows.

Ben White did not look jolly at all, for he was deathly pale, and his hand trembled as he put it out to welcome Joe.

"Why, Master Ben," said Joe, losing all shyness, "you look like Mollie did when she was getting over the fever; you must have been awful sick!"

What a happy time that was for Joe! It was a joy to him to wait upon such a cheerful invalid—a joy to go up and down stairs all day long. Sometimes he read aloud till Ben almost choked with laughter at his mistakes; sometimes he listened to Ben's stories of the big fishes he had caught and the long tramps he had taken; and sometimes Joe told his own experience—a very limited experience he thought it, in comparison with that of the merry-hearted boy on the sofa.

"Bring me that box," said Ben to Joe one day, pointing to a box on a table.

Joe sprang to obey. Ben opened the box with a key from his watch-chain, and took out a well-filled purse.

"You see now, partner," said Ben, "it is time for

us to attend to business. You are the junior partner, so you must listen while I talk. You see partners sometimes put different things into a concern, and share the profits alike. Suppose you have money and I understand business; well, we go in together, and what we make we share. Suppose I understand foreign languages, French, and all that sort of thing, and you don't. Well, I go to Europe and buy goods, and you stay at home and see to receiving and selling them. That's the way in a partnership. Do you understand?"

Joe bowed his head in a dignified manner, feeling quite too dignified and mystified to speak.

"Well, you see how it is," continued Ben; "we are partners. I get a sickness; how are we to share it? Why, I take the pains and lie on my back, talking like a windmill. You have legs and no pains. You go up and down stairs and get me what I want, and don't mind hearing a long yarn now and then.

"Well, that's fair, just as it should be between partners. But about money matters—we go shares there, of course. Here we have twenty-five dollars. I've been laying it up for ever so long, not knowing what I was to do with it. It's my own-ny-ony, and I can use it as I think best.

"Here comes this sickness. I take my half of the money. Well, father'll pay Pills, of course; but there are many little comforts a sick fellow must have that cost something, so I put my share back in the box and call it sickness fund. See, I'll write that on a piece of paper and put with it. What is the half of twenty-five, Joe?"

"Twelve dollars and a half," said Joe promptly, for he had been privately making the computation.

"Right!" said Ben, with a business air—"right,

partner. There, that is your share to pay your expenses. Maybe your mother will advise you about spending it when you go home."

"Will your father like it?" said Joe, not offering to touch the money. "Is it quite right for me to have it?"

"Right as the Declaration of Independence!" said Ben, intending to be oratorical.

At this moment Mr. White entered the room. Ben explained to him promptly, and with an air of the strictest justice, the division he had made.

Mr. White smiled a kindly smile. The ice was broken now between the father and son.

"Don't make paupers of your poor friends, Ben; that will only do them harm," Mr. White had said; and he was amused to see how Ben was getting over this difficulty.

"A very proper division of cash between partners," said Mr. White, giving Joe a friendly pat on the shoulder. "You are a very good manager, Ben. Perhaps, as you have such a taste for business, you can help me in my difficulty. I find the Channing estate very troublesome to settle. There is to be a great deal of mere tread-mill work for somebody—papers to copy and long columns to add up. I wish I could get hold of the proper person to help me."

"I wish I wrote something better than a scrawl," said Ben. "Even if I were well I should not be of much use to you, I am such a shocking fellow with the pen. I mean to turn over a new leaf when I am about again, and learn to write like a thorough business man."

Mr. White turned to leave the room.

"Here might be a chance for father," thought Joe. "But no, I never could speak of it."

Joe looked at Mr. White's grave and anxious face. No, he durst not make the proposal that was in his mind.

"Joe, you are a coward! You haven't a bit of spirit in you!"

With such goading taunts Joe was in the habit of getting up his courage on emergencies; but these stimulants did not save him now.

Mr. White had his hand on the lock of the door, when suddenly Joe's memory gave him the words, "The Lord that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, he will deliver me from this Philistine."

Mr. White, quite unconscious of being a Philistine in the eyes of little Joe, turned toward him as he stood, and said kindly,—

"Don't be afraid, Joe, to share with your partner. It's all right."

Joe was strong in the right strength now, and he hastened to say,—

"Please, Mr. White, please, sir, my father is a splendid hand at figures, and he writes like the schoolmaster."

Joe put his hand into his pocket and drew out his little Testament.

"See here, sir," he continued—"see here; he wrote my name in my book. The figures, too—ain't they about right?"

It was not at all in the scornful spirit of Goliath that Mr. White looked down at the eager little boy. Joe was pointing proudly at the place where his name and a date had lately been written by his father, with a reference to the verse, "Be not afraid, only believe," which had so moved him.

"That is a good, clear hand, Joe; and the figures are like copper-plate," said Mr. White.

"You might ride over, father, and see if Mr. Barber could help you," said Ben, in great excitement. "That would be splendid!"

"Will you? Please do," ventured little Joe.

"I will," said Mr. White as he closed the door and left the boys together.

Joe stepped gently to Ben's side and laid his hand in his.

"I believe it will be," he said earnestly; "I believe it will be, because I asked that father might have some different work from what he has now."

"Asked it?" said Ben inquiringly.

"Yes, asked it in my prayers," answered Joe simply.

"Do you really ask for what you want about such things when you pray?" said Ben soberly.

"Why, yes. Don't you?" said Joe, opening his eyes wide.

Ben White would rather have sat up all night than to have voluntarily given up saying his prayers; but he did not always think it necessary to kneel down for the purpose. He could go over them after he was in bed, he thought, just as well; and he did not feel it a great sin if he sometimes fell asleep in the midst. Lately he had been praying on his knees that he might lead a more faithful Christian life, and be useful in his day and generation; but such asking as Joe spoke of, he knew nothing of it, and he felt it.

"Dear little Joe," said Ben affectionately, "you must ask that your partner may know more about these things, and pray better."

"It was mother that taught me," said Joe. "She says we are to think of God as somebody who loves us, and wants to hear our prayers and give us just what we need."

"I haven't any mother," said Ben sadly. "I lost her when I was a baby. But I hope I shall come out right somehow."

"That you will! that you will!" exclaimed Joe.

Ben felt the nearer to his heavenly Father as he grasped the hand of his little partner, who seemed to him a link to better things.

Yes, Ben White had lost his mother in his babyhood; but not lost to him were the earnest prayers she had poured out for her child. Even now they were being answered, as he groped his way along the path to the Better Land.

As for Mr. White, he lost no time in seeking out Harry Barber. Exactly what passed between them never transpired. Certain it is that when Mr. White rode away from that lonely home on the hillside, it was with a deep resolution to lead a more holy, active Christian life than ever before—to be heart and soul a servant of God, as one who must render up his account before an Almighty Judge.

The comfortable city gentleman, sheltered from his youth, tempted to no vices, had never before come face to face with a soul in desperate struggle with sin, helpless, but laying hold of the Cross as the one hope for life and death and judgment.

Before this humbled penitent, ready to give up his darling sin, cost him what it would, and to fight indeed the good fight of faith, Mr. White felt that he was but as the Pharisee wrapped in his own good works. As he shook Harry's hand as they parted at the turnpike, the words came to his mind, "This man went down to his house justified rather than the other."

"Yes," he thought, "perhaps this poor slave of sin, set free by Jesus, and clinging to his deliverer, is

nearer the gate of heaven than a respectable, lukewarm Christian, who can remember no real battle with temptation, no conflict in which he has been saved so as by fire."

Mr. White had a new view of life, its aims and its responsibilities.

As for Harry Barber, he little dreamed of the effect the story of his struggles had produced upon his grave, quiet listener. The happy husband was rejoicing with his wife over the promise of work that would occupy him head and hand, and help him to give to his family those comforts of which his misdeeds had so long deprived them. How he thanked his heavenly Father, who was so tenderly taking the repentant prodigal by the hand!

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BUSINESS OF THE FIRM.

FOUR years had passed quickly away. Ben White was at home for a college vacation. At his father's country-seat, near a pretty northern village, he was established, as happy a fellow as ever a glad parent was privileged to welcome.

It was Sunday morning. The first bell for church was ringing cheerily. After a rapid walk, Mr. White and Ben were almost in the shadow of the slender spire.

"We are a little early, after all," said Ben; "suppose we sit down a while here under the elm. How many good times I've had on this old seat!"

On the broad bench they all sat down. There were three in their little party. Ben had brought home a classmate with him; not one of his special, intimate friends, but a poor lad from a far-away home, whom Ben had been afraid to trust to the chance companions and occupations of a collegiate town in vacation. Ben had found him sinking into dissipation, and had given him a friendly right hand, to draw him toward better things. Now, with a promise of riding, fishing, and hunting, enough to satisfy anybody, he had attracted his guest, resolved to spend his own vacation to get his young classmate steadily walking in a safe path.



A FRIENDLY GREETING—THE PARTNERS MEET.

"There's a funny sight!" said the visitor. "Just look at that queer little freckled-faced man, with a high hat on, and his tall wife taking his arm as if he were a king. Why, there isn't a ruffle or a wrinkle on her clean calico dress; she must have ironed it on Sunday morning. And just see that little couple behind, aping the father and mother—taking arms, too! That tall, round-faced girl is a perfect picture; and the boy, he holds himself like an officer. He really looks quite martial. I am almost afraid of him!"

This silly speech did not provoke the expected laughter.

"I reverence that woman," said Mr. White soberly; "and that little man, he gave me once a lesson which I trust I shall never forget all the days of my life."

Ben did not stay to hear his father tell Harry Barber's story to the young visitor.

"How are you, partner?" cried Ben, as he gave Joe such a shake of the hand as almost made him scream in the midst of his joy. Ben had been first in gymnastics the last term, and his grip was like a blacksmith's.

Such warm greetings as were exchanged! such a smiling and shaking of hands!

When this was all over, Joe said with a significant glance at the visitor, "You have brought him down with you?"

"Yes; we must keep him out of mischief," was the answer. "And your boy, Joe, the big butcher's lad, how does he come on?"

"First rate," said Joe eagerly; "you'll see him this morning, in the second pew from the door. We are going to sit there with him. He's as steady as—

as steady as you, partner," concluded Joe with a smile.

"Then the business goes on well," said Ben. "Tell him I've brought down a lot of nice books with me; and one all about mutton and beef and poultry, I'll make him a present of. Mind you don't forget that. Good-bye. I'll see you in the morning at the store. Good-bye."

"The store" was the favourite place of meeting for the men of the village. No bar attracted them there. It was a temperance store, where almost everything could be bought but what the drunkard craves.

Behind the store was a little reading-room, well supplied with daily papers and a few carefully selected books—a cool resort in summer, and an attractive place in winter evenings, with its glowing stove, cheerful lights, and active little Joe, the clerk, to wait upon the readers. A hobby of Mr. White's, the objectors called it; but they had to own, nevertheless, that it was a blessing to the village.

Here Harry Barber, in a new home, far from his old associates, had been established by Mr. White; and here he was leading an honest, industrious, Christian life.

Harry rarely spoke of his old habits; but sometimes, when he saw a young man being gradually led into temptation, he would tell him the story of his evil courses, and of that awful night when his own life and the future of the sinner stood so plainly before him. Such an interview a young man never forgot.

As for Joe, he was openly for temperance, he said, and he didn't care who knew it.

He and his partner had that for their private and

special business, and went hand-in-hand in all their plans.

Now, at the church door, they had been exchanging a few words about those who were just then their peculiar objects of interest.

And Kate Barber? she did, indeed take her Harry's arm, as proudly as if he had been a king. She treasured up no remembrance of the days of his humiliation. He was to her the dear husband who had triumphed over temptation, the Christian friend and beloved companion with whom she was walking heavenward with a glad and thankful heart.

THE END.



